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ABSTRACT

Today, homosexuality has become a topic of discussion throughout the psychological community and society at large. However, there is great controversy about the etiology of homosexuality and more specifically, lesbianism. This paper describes a review of the literature to examine the hypothesis that a multitude of factors may influence the development of a lesbian sexual orientation. It examines whether lesbianism is the result of environmental influences or is secondary to biological factors. Studies to evaluate biological factors, which include maternal stress, genetic and hormonal factors, have not concurred about factors that can lead to an increase in the number of offspring with lesbian tendencies. Environmental predisposition towards lesbianism such as familial, sexual abuse, psychosocial, and developmental factors indicate that a combination of these factors may lead a woman towards development of a lesbian sexual orientation. The research concludes that multiple pathways may lead to a lesbian or heterosexual orientation, thereby allowing for the interplay of both biological and psychosocial factors. The paper concludes that it is imperative that the psychological community continues to research lesbian sexual orientation to make information available and accurate to help eliminate the myths, misconceptions, and prejudices regarding the origin of a lesbian sexual orientation. (Contains 50 references.) (JDM)

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A LESBIAN SEXUAL ORIENTATION:
A LITERATURE REVIEW

A Doctoral Research Paper
Presented to
the Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology
Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Psychology

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August, 1999

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OF A LESBIAN SEXUAL ORIENTATION:
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ABSTRACT

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LESBIAN SEXUAL ORIENTATION:

A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Patti Lynne Brunold

Sexuality, present from birth, is an inseparable part of building one's identity and learning to be an individual. Today, homosexuality has become a topic of discussion throughout the psychological community and society at large. However, there is great controversy about the etiology of homosexuality and more specifically "lesbianism." This literature review examines the hypothesis that a multitude of factors may influence the development of a lesbian sexual orientation. The evidence suggests that it is imperative that an awareness of the underlying issues is necessary to examine what variables influence sexual orientation. In using a holistic approach, each factor was defined and reviewed. It was concluded that many of these factors predisposed a woman to a lesbian sexual orientation.

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FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT
OF A LESBIAN SEXUAL ORIENTATION:
A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The etiology of lesbianism is an issue of significant debate. There is a great deal of controversy about whether lesbianism is a result of some inborn factor or environmental variables. Many theories have been offered from different fields of research. Much more research has been done on the etiology of male homosexuality and yet there are no data that "prove" the etiology. However, research should continually assess the function of the total personality and be concerned with the biological, sociological, psychological, familial, and spiritual variables of life which, by their effects on personality development and interpersonal relationships can, in turn, affect social structure. It is probable that the best explanation comes from this multidimensional framework.

Even though same-sex attraction and behavior have occurred throughout history, Patterson (1995) stated that lesbian and gay identities are relatively new. It appears that the recognition of exclusive homosexual identity emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Only in recent years have women identified themselves

as openly gay or lesbian.

Homosexuality is no longer technically considered to be pathological in its nature. In many circles, homosexuality is believed to be an alternative lifestyle. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-III (DSM-III; American Psychiatric Association, 1980) homosexuality was only diagnosed if the person experienced it as ego-dystonic or unwanted. For the first time, in the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM-IV; 1994), homosexuality was not listed. This adds to some of the controversy surrounding the topic of the etiology of homosexuality.

By removing homosexuality and lesbianism from the DSM-IV, the psychological community has been dissuaded from looking at root issues. Conversely, if homosexuality and lesbianism were to be in the DSM-IV, the psychological community would then be obligated to consider root issues that factor into the development of a lesbian orientation.

Ernulf, Innala, and Whitman (1989) have observed that the issue of causation of homosexuality seems unimportant or irrelevant in today's society. These authors postulated that this is not true, however, and that the issue of causation is important in the subject of human rights. If women choose to be lesbian, their self identities and civil rights should be protected. In contrast, women for whom their lesbianism is ego-dystonic should also be afforded the same civil rights. Ego-dystonic lesbians should conceivably be able to receive assistance from the psychological community to support them holistically. This

would promote the integration of somatic, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of their sexual being in ways that are positively enriching and that enhance an understanding of their identity. An awareness of the development of sexual orientation is important to understanding the identity of the person.

This review will cover articles written in the past 25 years as found through a computer search. Some of the articles included the etiology of both male and female homosexuality. However, this paper will focus on female homosexuality or lesbianism.

To better understand the topic of lesbian development it is necessary to have a comprehensive awareness of the definitions used in the literature. It has become evident that various authors define terms differently. The following is an array of terms that will be used throughout this paper.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality is the tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993). Byne and Parsons (1993) stated that there is no universally accepted definition of homosexuality. These authors went on to state that sexual orientation is a cognitive and emotional identification of a person on a continuum of homosexual to heterosexual behavior.

Some authors (Coleman, 1987; Comiskey, 1989; Ernulf et al., 1989; Jones & Workman, 1989) define homosexuality, thus lesbianism, as not limited to sexual behavior, but including or consisting of an attraction to or romantic

affection for a person of the same sex, regardless of genital contact. They continued by stating that a person can have a homosexual orientation without homosexual behavior. Homosexuality is a consistent preference for sexual relations with members of one's own sex. This is different from occasional homosexual experiences, but it is a preference consistently made in the presence of other alternatives (Ellis & Ames, 1987).

Sexual Identity

Davidson (1976) theorized that sexual identity is a continuum on which people are placed, or place themselves, according to the frequency of their homosexual or heterosexual ideation and behavior. Sexual identity reflects our human character. It is the sense of masculinity or femininity, or being like a male or female (Luckmann & Sorensen, 1987).

Lesbianism

The term lesbianism has different meanings. Sophie (1987) indicated that the meaning of lesbian identity differs from one person to another. She went on to state that, for many people, the word lesbian has a political meaning. It appears that lesbianism is commonly understood to be a sexual attraction of one woman to another.

Sexual Orientation

Harry (1985) stated that sexual orientation is erotic feelings or attraction to another. The author went on to state that sexual orientation is best defined in terms

of preferences and attitudes rather than sexual behavior and that there may be a discrepancy between sexual behavior and feelings. Money (1987) stated that sexual orientation is not the same as sexual behavior. The criterion of falling in love with someone of the same genital and bodily morphology is the definitive criterion of homosexual orientation. However, homosexual behavior involves sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex (Comiskey, 1989).

For the purpose of this paper, a lesbian sexual orientation will be defined as an attraction to a person of the same sex, which may or may not be expressed in behavior. It will not necessarily be limited to sexual behavior between two women. The adaptation of this definition for the literature review is necessary in order to establish that lesbianism is not limited to behavior but has also been linked to emotional attraction. Furthermore, this definition will assist in reviewing the literature objectively by being open to all factors, not just sexual behaviors.

Methodological Considerations

There are several issues of methodological consideration that arise in researching lesbian development. These problems are important to consider when evaluating the research. These concerns include a lack of research on women, the use of retrospective studies, and volunteer biases. Several of the studies concerning homosexuality involved studies of other species, and their conclusions were then applied to humans. There is controversy as to whether these studies of

animal sexuality can realistically be generalized to human sexuality. Due to the lack of studies with women, it appears that the research is inconclusive. Thus, this review will continue to analyze all pertinent literature to reinforce the need to explore underlying issues regarding the sexual identity of lesbianism.

Ellis and Ames (1987) theorized that knowledge gained from nonhuman mammalian experiments can be used to help understand human sexual differences. Money (1987) stated that animal experiments show conclusively that sex hormones influence the male-female dimorphism of the brain in both animals and humans. Ehrhardt et al. (1985) reported several studies of lower animals that have been generalized to humans. They stated that the generalization of animal behavior to human behavior, especially in relation to sexual orientation, is controversial. Jones and Workman (1989) stated that animal studies may be thought-provoking, yet are not compelling arguments for homosexual development in humans. Byne and Parsons (1993) stated that the suitability of prospective behavior in rodents as a model for sexual behavior in humans is questionable.

Meyer-Bahlburg et al. (1995) suggested that there is a vast difference between rodents and humans, and researchers have reason to be wary of the extrapolation from rodent studies to human behavior. Even though there is no consensus among authors on animal studies being generalized to human activities, the studies should continue because an increasing number of studies have demonstrated that hormone-sex behavior relationships in animals extends to

sexuality-related preference measures. This makes plausible the use of animal models for experimental purposes.

In homosexual research, there is a disproportionate focus on male homosexuality with little research on lesbians, leaving a large gap in the understanding of lesbian development. Boxer and Cohler (1989) raised the question as to whether there are parallel factors for male homosexuals and lesbians. Bailey, Pillard, Neale, and Agyel (1992) contended that there is no reason to expect that genetic findings for females will be similar to males due to the different biological and genetic processes of male and female homosexuality. Although there are insufficient numbers of studies, the psychological community has a responsibility to study the information.

Another concern that must be kept in mind is that much of the research on homosexuality is retrospective (Boxer & Cohler, 1989; Ellis, Ames, Peckham, & Burke, 1988). This research relies on adults reconstructing childhood experiences. Inferences about causality made from retrospective studies can be problematic because of faulty recall and perceptions which may result in random error in the data. Although childhood experiences viewed from an adult perspective are often seen through current cultural ideologies, they are nevertheless valid.

Many studies are also done on a volunteer or, self-referral, basis. This leads to questions about biases that the women may have had when filling out the surveys (Bailey & Benishay, 1993; Meyer-Bahlburg et al., 1995). Bailey and

Benishay (1993) reported that the patterns of volunteering in these studies may have yielded misleading results. Recruiting techniques may be socially and politically biased. Examples can be elicited by the following questions: Was it in a social setting that promoted lesbianism? Was the advertisement in a politically liberal publication? How was the advertisement stated? Even though the studies are biased they still have enough information to make them significant since no study is without bias.

Studies on lesbian development and familial influence have examined the nature of the parent and child relationship. Boxer and Cohler (1989) stated that children may influence parents in as many different ways as parents influence children. Ellis and Ames (1987) stated that parents may respond differently to homosexual children than to heterosexual offspring, even before their orientation is manifested. Davidson (1976) cautioned the reader not to haphazardly label a family or familial pattern as pathological without careful study of other factors. Siegelman (1981) suggested that the tendency of lesbians to withdraw from their parents may cause the parents to be more rejecting toward the child. When reading studies of familial impact, it must be remembered that the rejection of the child may have as much to do with the child exhibiting what is viewed by the parents as lesbian or masculine behavior. So rejection may be one of the causal factors for lesbianism.

Weinberg (1984) raised another concern when comparing biological and

psychological developmental stages. The author defined biological stages as observable, verifiable, and having a beginning and an end. He went on to state that psychological stages are not "biologically real" and thus cannot be verified. This would influence how researchers come to understand homosexual identity. Although the author has stated this, it would be up to future researchers not to ignore this pathway in trying to understand a lesbian sexual identity.

To adequately study the identity of an individual, gender, culture, race, social class, and ethnicity are all variables that need to be considered. Patterson (1995) reported that these factors relate to both sexual orientation and human development and must be addressed. Coleman (1987) postulated that other social and demographic variables (e.g., class, race, income, religion) may be of equal or greater importance in the analysis of sexual development. Cass (1983-1984) agreed, stating that a multidisciplinary approach to the issue is necessary if all aspects of homosexual identity are to be adequately examined. This paper will take this needed, multidisciplinary approach to more fully understand the sexual orientation of a lesbian.

Biological Factors

There are indications that biological factors may contribute to the development of a lesbian sexual orientation. It is assumed that these factors are prenatal in nature, such as maternal stress, hormonal, or genetic factors. Few

studies have been done on females in this area, but they provide important information concerning the development of a lesbian identity.

Maternal Stress

Ellis et al. (1988) presented a study to determine whether maternal stress has an effect on sexual orientation of offspring. The authors tested 283 mothers and their offspring. Ellis et al. found no significant difference between the stress severity of mothers of female heterosexuals and lesbians. Nevertheless, during the three trimesters of pregnancy, mothers of lesbians reported somewhat higher levels of stress than mothers of female heterosexuals. This suggests that, though the prenatal stress in this study was not statistically significant, there was some stress. Further research on maternal stressors is needed to assess the possible relation between maternal stress and sexual orientation of offspring.

Genetic Factors

Bailey and Benishay (1993) explored the idea that female homosexuality is familial. The authors studied female subjects with twins ($n = 115$) and adoptive sisters ($n = 32$), who were selected through advertisements placed in lesbian-oriented publications in several cities throughout the United States. These women were rated on the Kinsey rating scale (Kinsey, Pomeray, & Martin, 1953), which measures levels of heterosexual to homosexual feelings and behaviors. The women scored a mean rating of 4.8 on a scale of 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating a higher level of homosexual feelings or behaviors. These data indicated a fairly

high level of homosexual orientation for the sample as a whole. The authors found that 34 (48%) monozygotic twins, 6 (16%) dizygotic twins, and only 2 (6%) adoptive sisters were homosexual. The correlation between monozygotic twins was significantly higher than for both dizygotic cotwins and adoptive sisters. In addition, the authors reported that heritability was significant and appreciable ($> 25\%$) which suggested that genes influence developmental differences among lesbian women. At the same time, 52% of the monozygotic twins were not homosexual, which suggests that, although genetics seem to play a part in lesbianism, they obviously do not manifest total determination.

In a study of lesbian ($n = 84$) and female heterosexual ($n = 79$) subjects, Bailey and Benishay (1993) found that female homosexuality may be familial. Using four definitions of homosexuality, 12.1% to 34.8% of the sisters of lesbian probands indicated that they were homosexual compared to 2.4% to 13.8% of sisters of heterosexual probands ($p < 0.05$). This could indicate either a genetic component of female homosexuality or may involve familial environmental factors.

Hormonal Factors

In a review of animal research literature, Jones and Workman (1989) reported that hormonal levels in the human fetus can affect the physical development as well as the sexual orientation of the person. The authors reported that abnormal hormone levels introduced into animal fetuses affect sexual

differentiation and sexual development in animals. In this review the results were unspecified. The authors stated that the right dose of sex hormone given to an animal fetus at a critical time can result in animals showing homosexual behavior. If generalized to humans, this could mean that abnormal hormonal levels in humans may affect sexual orientation.

Money's (1987) laboratory rat experiments suggested that sex hormones influence the male-female dimorphism of the brain prenatally. This prenatal hormonalization of the brain influences the subsequent sexual orientation of the animal. Again, generalization to humans might mean that sex hormones introduced prenatally affect the development of sexual orientation of the fetus.

Meyer-Bahlburg et al. (1995) compared several groups of women with a history of prenatal exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES). DES is a synthetic estrogen that was widely used for preventative treatment of at risk pregnancies until it was banned in 1971. The sample group consisted of three DES samples ($n = 30$) and three control groups ($n = 30$) to assess various aspects of sexual orientation. Across the studies, the authors found that women with a history of prenatal DES exposure scored higher on the Kinsey scale (Kinsey et al., 1953) than nonexposed women from several different control groups, indicating a higher propensity for lesbianism. This may be due to the fact that DES stimulates androgen production or to the toxic aspects of DES on the differentiating brain. Although the differences in scores between DES-exposed women and controls

were significant, the extent to which bisexuality and homosexuality were increased in these women was modest.

In another study of DES-exposed women, Ehrhardt et al. (1985) examined the influence of prenatal DES exposure on sexual orientation in females.

According to the authors, in comparison with the control group, the DES exposed women had higher Kinsey scores (Kinsey et al., 1953) on all items with most of the differences having at least borderline statistical significance ($p < 0.10$).

Twenty-four percent of the DES women showed bisexual or homosexual responsiveness, and the control group showed 3% bisexual or homosexual responsiveness (one-tailed test, $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$, respectively). Compared to a control group of sisters, the DES women had higher scores on all 10 Kinsey variables (Kinsey et al., 1953) than their nonexposed sisters. Ehrhardt et al. suggested that these findings are not proof of hormonal contribution to the development of sexual orientation in females, but may indicate that hormones contribute in some way to the development of a lesbian sexual orientation.

Gonadal hormones have been hypothesized to play an important role in the development of sex-typed behavior and sexual orientation. Berenbaum and Snyder (1995) studied hormonal influences on activity and playmate preferences in children with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH). The authors noted that CAH, which produces high levels of androgen during sensitive periods of development, may produce masculine typical behavior and orientation. Twenty- four women

with CAH and a control group of sixteen unaffected sisters were studied. CAH girls showed significantly greater preference for boy's activities than did their unaffected sisters. These girls spent significantly more time playing with boys' toys and less time playing with girls' toys than did the control group. The CAH girls showed significant differences compared to the control group on their scores on the playmate preference task. Although the CAH girls show boy typical activity preference, the preferences are not as extreme as those of boys. Berenbaum and Snyder suggested that early androgen production appears to influence at least one childhood behavior that differentiates heterosexual and homosexual women, interest in boys' activities. The largest differences between homosexual and heterosexual women appeared on sex-typed activities and interests, which supports the hypothesis that sexual orientation is also influenced by early androgen.

Familial Factors

Significant familial factors appear to contribute to the development of a lesbian sexual orientation. Results of research on the parent-child relationship suggest that it has a significant effect on the development of the identity of the child. The interaction of parent and child, therefore, contributes to the girl's sexual orientation.

Empirical Conclusions

Siegelman (1981) studied the parental backgrounds of lesbian ($n = 61$) and heterosexual women ($n = 49$). On the Parent-Child Relations Questionnaire, Short Form 2 (Siegelman, 1981), heterosexual women reported that their fathers were more loving and protecting and their mothers were less rejecting when they were growing up, compared to reports by the lesbian women. Lesbians reported that their fathers were less loving and more rejecting. They also reported their mothers were less loving. The heterosexual women reported that they felt closer to their fathers. There also appeared to be greater family security among heterosexual women. The lesbians felt less love and security from both of their parents.

There were no significant differences on the dimensions of closeness to mother or parent dominance. Siegelman (1981) stated that these perceptions by the subjects of their parents may be a significant differentiating factor of lesbian versus heterosexual women. Lesbians may tend to grow up with negative or distant feelings toward their parents as they perceive their parents to be different from themselves.

Siegelman (1981) stated that it is difficult to know anything about the cause-and-effect direction from the data in his study. It is possible that the tendency of lesbians to withdraw from, or even reject, their heterosexual parents may cause the parents to be more rejecting and less loving toward them. The parents may also reject the child irrespective of the child's behavior, which leads

to feelings of being unloved and unwanted.

Siegelman (1981) finally suggested that early parent-daughter interactions may be a factor in the development of lesbian orientation, but that the prevalence of that role is not clear. He further stated that parental background is probably a factor in the lives of some lesbians, but not in the lives of others.

Thompson, Schwartz, McCandles, and Edwards (1973) compared parent-child relationships and sexual identity of white, well-educated lesbians ($n = 84$) and a matched control group of heterosexual women ($n = 94$). The pattern that emerged for the lesbians was one of tomboyishness and feelings of maternal rejection. Examining chi-squared differences on items from the Parent-Child Interactions Questionnaire, seven were at the .001 level. These items were: (a) played baseball (More lesbians marked often or very often; more heterosexuals marked sometimes); (b) physical make-up as a child (More lesbians chose athletic; more heterosexuals chose coordinated); (c) played with girls before adolescence (More lesbians answered sometimes; more heterosexuals answered often or always); (d) avoided physical fights (More lesbians marked sometimes or never; more heterosexuals marked always or often); (e) accepted mother (More lesbians chose moderately; more heterosexuals chose strongly); (f) felt accepted by mother (More lesbians answered moderately through not at all; more heterosexual answered strongly); and (g) father openly preferred child to mother (More lesbians marked always and often; more heterosexuals marked seldom or never). Thus, the

lesbians reportedly felt more rejection from their mothers and felt that their fathers preferred them over their mothers.

Thompson et al. (1973) reported that, as a whole, the lesbian women were more similar to the "classical" male homosexual pattern in relationship to their parents than the female control group. In this pattern, the mother is close-binding and intimate with the child. She is dominant and minimizing toward her husband. The father is detached and hostile to the child.

On a measure of perceived parental and sex role similarity, the lesbians, compared to the female control group, were more distant from both parents as well as from both females and males. Thompson et al. (1973) stated that the picture which emerges is one of distance and alienation from people in general. It appears that the lesbians saw themselves as equally distant from both their mothers and fathers. In relationships in general, they did perceive themselves closer to their biological sex (female) than to the opposite sex (male). However, they were more distant from both than was true with the female heterosexual group. Thompson et al. went on to report that, on the Adjective Check List Masculinity-Femininity Scale, the lesbians scored more masculine than the heterosexual control group ($p < .01$).

Thompson et al. (1973) suggested that a prominent role is played by a weak or hostile father in the development of a lesbian orientation. However, the mother's role was lacking in this development. An alienation from mothers,

fathers, as well as other people seems apparent among lesbians.

Gundlach and Riess (1967) suggested that a variety of circumstances may have an impact on the development of sexual identity in the life of a person. The authors reported that in a study of lesbians ($n = 217$) and nonlesbians ($n = 231$), proportionately more lesbians were the only child or the first born child in smaller families. In larger families (i.e., more than four children), the authors found that lesbians more often were among the three youngest children rather than the older four.

Gundlach and Riess (1967) found that some lesbians whose parents may have wanted a son, saw the son's position as superior to their own role and fought for that position. Some lesbians reported feelings of having been neglected, ignored, unloved, and unwanted. The authors also reported that in the sample of 54 women, 39 lesbians and 15 nonlesbians reported being objects of rape or attempted rape at age 15 or younger.

In the study of familial factors in the development of a homosexual orientation, most of the studies have been with heterosexual families. Researchers have attempted to demonstrate the influence of the parent's behavior on the sexual development of the child. Glomobok and Tasker (1996) studied the impact of being raised by a lesbian mother on sexual orientation and suggested that this may add to the understanding of what influence parents have on the child's sexual orientation. The authors studied lesbian mothers ($n = 27$) and their 39 children and

a control group of heterosexual single mothers ($n = 27$) and their 39 children. In a follow-up study, Golombok and Tasker found no significant difference between adults raised in lesbian families and those raised in single-mother heterosexual households regarding the proportion who reported sexual attraction for someone of the same gender. However, they found that those from a lesbian household were more likely to consider the possibility of having a lesbian relationship. The authors stated that the assumption that children brought up by lesbian mothers would themselves grow up to be lesbian was not supported by this study.

Theoretical Conclusions

The following articles come from a theoretical standpoint based on the authors' years of experience in working with homosexuals and lesbians in a clinical setting. Although the findings reflect the authors' opinions, the clinical experience and anecdotal reporting is valuable in that it represents the experiences of hundreds of people.

Dallas (1991) theorized that homosexuality is a relational problem having its roots in some relational deficit between parent and child, the child and other children, or even herself. He maintained that lesbianism is not one isolated problem, but is symptomatic of other problems that are deeply ingrained.

There is a conscious perception on the part of the daughter of a disruption in the relationship with the same-sex parent (mother). The daughter feels rejection, indifference, or abandonment from the mother and develops a need for maternal

care. The daughter then responds emotionally by detaching from the mother's affection, which in turn causes a similar detachment from her peers (Dallas, 1991), creating a deficit in the meeting of these legitimate emotional needs. During puberty, unmet needs tend to become sexualized. These unmet needs are linked with sexual desires and a search for female (mother) love and are acted out in lesbian relationships as adults.

In some relationships, there is an "extension making" on the part of the mother whereby she uses her daughter to satisfy her own needs. The daughter has to take care of the mother's needs and learns that she will receive love and be rewarded with affection as long as she continues to please her mother. The daughter then loses herself and becomes an extension of her mother. She becomes her mother's confidante, caretaker, and comforter, then generalizes this to other women and feels that she is designed to meet the satisfaction of another woman's personal, adult needs (Dallas, 1991).

Howard (1991) theorized that the roots of lesbianism lie in the relationship between the daughter and each parent. Howard stated that there are several things that can happen in the relationship with the mother. There is a legitimate need for intimacy between the mother and child. When there is a lack of nurture from the mother, this can create a sense of isolation from the mother and an emotional distance and detachment. Howard states that there is still a need to give and receive love, to be nurtured, and to feel secure. The lesbian continues to look for

this in other women.

Howard (1991) emphasized that some mothers have a "doormat mentality." The child sees her as downtrodden, weak, and ineffective and has little or no respect for her. The mother is the role model for the daughter, and if the daughter saw her as sexless, unaffirming, and inadequate, the daughter may detach from her. The mother may not be secure in her role as a woman or as a mother. The inability to affirm this in the daughter may create the attitude in the child that it is not alright to be a woman. All of these factors may cause the daughter to detach from the mother, leaving the daughter with unfulfilled needs that she tries to meet through other women in lesbian relationships.

Howard (1991) postulated that the father also has a role in the sexual development of the daughter. One of the father's main roles is to affirm his daughter in her femininity. A father's approval or disapproval helps shape a girl's image of herself. If the father fails in this role, the daughter may become inhibited in effectively relating to men. Therefore, some girls build up their own sense of the masculine and emphasize independence, control, duty, and other characteristics to the detriment of the feminine qualities that may be emerging. Several different factors which have been discussed may contribute to the development of a lesbian sexual orientation. These factors interact to contribute to the girl's sexual orientation, often leading to lesbianism.

Davis and Rentzel (1993) affirmed that there are several factors that can

contribute to a lesbian sexual orientation. Early childhood development lays the groundwork for sexual orientation. A disrupted bonding with the mother can lead to detachment. If the mother has ambivalence about the daughter, she can feel wounded and rejected, resulting in further detachment from the mother. The daughter is then left with a same-sex love deficit which she seeks to fill with lesbian relationships.

Comisky (1989) contended that early childhood interactions with parents contribute to a lesbian sexual orientation. If the mother, in her neediness, relies on the daughter as a sounding board for her woes, the daughter can become resentful and develop a lack of respect for the mother. This causes the daughter to detach from the mother, which leaves love and nurture deficits.

Comisky (1989) suggested that if there is a broken image of femininity from the mother's role, the daughter detaches from that role. If the daughter perceives femininity as powerlessness, she will begin to believe that femininity means submission. This overwhelming burden of caring for the needs of others without her own needs being considered will lead to the detachment from the feminine part of herself.

Comisky (1989) indicated that the father also plays a part in the development of a lesbian orientation. If the father is abusive toward the mother and/or has continued extramarital affairs, the daughter observes the hurt of the mother and detaches herself from the father. The daughter shuts off herself

emotionally from the father. Comisky stated that the daughter generalizes this detachment to all men and cuts herself off from relationship with men.

Whitehead (1996a) suggested that lesbianism is a defensive rejection of a female identity together with a compensating drive to reattach. The drive to reattach plays out as "fusion" in a lesbian relationship. This fusion wars with a deep-seated defense mechanism of defensive rejection, which separates the lesbian from the very thing she seeks in relationship. There is an ambivalence toward the relationship with other women issuing from difficult early and adolescent family relationships. There tends to be a breakdown in attachment, identification and role-modeling with the same-sex parent. Whitehead reported that lesbians whose mothers were poor role-models, weak, or abused often chose partners who were the opposite: strong, assertive, educated, and competent.

Moberly (1983) maintained that lesbianism is a result of difficulties in the mother-daughter relationship, especially in the early years of life. She explained that one constant underlying principle is that the daughter had suffered from some difficulty in the relationship with the mother. The daughter detached from the mother and developed a corresponding drive to fill this deficit through lesbian relationships. Moberly (1983) reported that a disruption in the normal attachment of the daughter with the mother implies that psychological needs that are normally met through the child's attachment to the parent are left unfulfilled and still require fulfillment. The needs for love from, dependence on, and identification with the

mother are met through the child's attachment to the mother. If this is disrupted, the needs that are normally met remain unmet. Moberly stated that there is a defensive detachment from the mother or a resistance to the restoration of the attachment. There is intrapsychic damage at a deep level, much of which may not be overt or conscious.

Moberly (1983) theorized that the repression of the normal need for attachment has to contend with the corresponding drive toward the undoing of repression or the drive toward the restoration of attachment, a reparative urge to make good earlier deficits in the mother daughter relationship. A woman may search for a mother-substitute to make up for previous deficits in mothering, whether or not this is consciously realized to be the goal of the lesbian relationship. The relationship is an attempt to resolve an abnormal detachment. Lesbianism seeks the fulfillment of normal attachment needs which have been left unmet. She concluded that there is a confusion of the unmet emotional needs of the nonadult with the physiological desires of the adult.

The development of a lesbian sexual orientation is a complex issue with many different factors playing a part. Many different familial factors can influence sexual development. It seems apparent, based on the observations of those who have worked clinically with lesbians, that there is a break in the mother-daughter relationship, and that the lesbian identity can be an attempt to fulfill the needs that were not met by the mother. If the daughter perceives her mother to be weak,

ineffective, or belittled, she may reject her own femininity. There appears to often be a corresponding lack of attachment with the father, which may cause the daughter to cut herself off from male relationships.

Sexual Abuse Factors

Another factor that has been explored in the development of a lesbian sexual orientation is that of sexual abuse or molestation. It seems that sexual abuse would play a factor in developing a lesbian orientation in that it might help create fear and mistrust of men in the women who had been abused as children or adults. Some women have been in abusive or nonsatisfying heterosexual relationships, have left their marriages and become lesbians (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). This area of abuse has not yet been thoroughly studied by researchers. There is need for further study in this area.

Empirical Conclusions

Cameron et al. (1986) explored the relationship between child molestation and homosexuality. The authors found that homosexuals of both sexes reported more frequent youthful (under 16 years of age) first sexual experiences with adult relatives or other caretakers than did heterosexuals. Among heterosexual women, 0.8% reported that their first sexual experience was with their father, whereas 6.3% of lesbians reported so. A first sexual experience with a teacher was reported by 4.7% of the lesbians, whereas only 0.2% of heterosexual women reported such.

Bisexuals or homosexuals of both sexes were about 10 times more likely to report sexual contact with adult members of their own gender than were heterosexuals. It appears that early incest or sexual abuse may contribute to the development of lesbianism.

In another study, Cameron and Cameron (1995) stated that homosexual experimentation, rape, or seduction may create an interest in homosexual behavior. The authors conducted a study of 5,182 adults using a questionnaire on sexual issues and found that incest was more common among bisexuals and homosexuals of both sexes. Female bisexuals or homosexuals ($n = 88$) comprised 3% of the sample. Of these, lesbians reported a 33% experience of same sex incest, a 9% experience of opposite sex incest, a 17% level of same sex sexual experiences with other relatives, and a 13% level of opposite-sex sexual experiences with other relatives. Cameron and Cameron stated that incest cannot be excluded as a significant factor in homosexuality.

In a review of empirical studies on the effects of childhood sexual abuse, Beitchman et al. (1992) argued that there is a relationship between a history of childhood sexual abuse and later homosexual behavior. The authors stated that there appeared to be a small but significant increased rate of homosexual behavior among women who have been sexually abused in childhood. They concluded that this must be considered tentative because only a small number of studies have examined this association.

Alexander and Lepfer (1987) studied female undergraduates ($n = 586$) to determine long term consequences of sexual abuse. Of these subjects, 25% reported being fondled or touched by a family member or older adult in a way that made them feel uncomfortable. The results of the study suggested that all women who had been sexually abused described their families as significantly less cohesive and less adaptable than women who had not been sexually abused. The authors also found that women who had not been abused had significantly higher physical self-concepts and family self-concepts than all other women who had been abused.

On the other hand, Brannoch and Chapman (1989), in a study of female heterosexual students ($n = 50$) and lesbians ($n = 50$), found that the women reported the same number of categories of traumatic experiences with men. The only significant differences were found using chi-square measures between the lesbians and heterosexual women on reported experiences of incest, molestations, rape, or other negative experiences with men. Heterosexual women were significantly more likely to report multiple negative experiences with men, whereas lesbians were more likely to have experienced one category of trauma. Contrary to the other studies in this review, this study suggested that previous traumatic experiences with men may not be a significant factor in the development of sexual orientation.

Theoretical Conclusions

Several authors (Davis & Rentzel, 1993; Comiskey, 1989) indicated that sexual abuse (e.g., incest, rape, molestation) may greatly impact a woman's sexual identity. This type of trauma leads to anger, rage, and hatred directed at men. The hatred becomes generalized toward all men which causes the woman to cut off relationships with men. Some women may even develop a phobia of male-female relationships.

Any trauma, including emotional abuse, verbal abuse, death in the family, separation and, especially, sexual abuse (i.e., incest, molestation, rape), can interfere with a woman's very sense of being. This may create anger at, and fear of, men. There can also be an anger at the mother which leads to a detachment from the mother and other women in general (Howard, 1991). The response to trauma can be overgeneralized and the woman can find herself hating all men and distrusting all women.

Carol Ahrens (Dallas, 1991) argued that there is a connection between early abuse and confusion in sexuality. Sexual abuse can lead to a hatred of men. Ahrens continued that women are seen as safe, loving, and nonthreatening. If that is the case, a woman will then turn to other women for comfort and bonding.

It appears that sexual abuse of any kind can be a factor in the development of a lesbian sexual orientation. It has been found that a small, but significant, number of women who have been abused have become lesbians. Women who

have been abused have significantly more negative physical self concepts than other women. These women also may mistrust and hate the men who abused them, leading to a generalized mistrust and hatred of all men. This would add to the need to sever sexual or emotional relationships with men.

Moral and Theological Factors

Moral and theological issues may play a role in the development of a lesbian orientation. Because of her beliefs, a woman coming from a deeply religious background may use her beliefs to fight any lesbian feelings she may have. If she considers homosexuality morally wrong, then she would tend to deny any lesbian feelings she may have. Cameron and Cameron (1995) argued that homosexual practices tend to be less prevalent among the religiously devout. They also found homosexuality frequently more prevalent among those who reported that they were reared in an irreligious or nonreligious home as opposed to those reared in a "devout Christian setting." Women raised in a religious setting may refrain from homosexual behavior because of their beliefs.

Several authors (Anderson, 1996; Schmidt, 1996) contended that recent revisionist attempts have been made to render the Bible neutral or positive toward homosexuality. Scholars interpret some biblical texts as culturally based and irrelevant to contemporary forms of homosexuality based on mutual love and commitment. In this view, to judge a lesbian orientation as wrong is to

discriminate against the basic rights of individuals to freely express their personal sexual orientation. This view would give some religious women the freedom to be involved in lesbian relationships without going against their religious beliefs. For the women, the revisionist view may have tended to sway beliefs, attitudes, and practices towards homosexuality.

Other Environmental Factors

There are also other environmental factors that might contribute to the development of a lesbian sexual orientation. Among those factors are psychological or psychoanalytical, developmental and psychosocial factors. These also may overlap with each other, with biological, or with familial factors.

Psychological/Psychoanalytical

There is a great deal of controversy over whether psychological factors have an impact on the homosexual development. As noted previously, the DSM-IV no longer lists homosexuality as a mental disorder, which seems to imply that psychological factors do not contribute to the development of a homosexual or lesbian orientation. Research appears to indicate that there is at least some impact of psychological factors on sexual development.

LaTorre and Wendenburg (1983) studied a group of female volunteers who were heterosexual ($n = 85$), bisexual ($n = 22$), and lesbian ($n = 18$) to determine levels of masculinity, femininity, and self-esteem. The authors found that those

women who had a sexual experience with another woman reported greater satisfaction with their bodies and body functions than did women who had not. The women who had sexual experiences with other women also reported being more satisfied with their sexual activities and their biological sex. One-way analyses of variance did not find significant differences in self-esteem among groups. LaTorre and Wendenburg stated that lesbians possess the same psychological characteristics as do heterosexual women. The authors also found that in lesbians, masculinity tended to exceed femininity, but they also tended toward the extremes of androgyny and undifferentiation.

Bailey and Benishay (1993), in their study of twins, stated that environment must also be of importance in the origins of lesbian orientation. The authors found that even the affective environment has factors that are not shared by the twins. The authors stated that studies of possible parental influences should focus less on stable attributes of the parental personalities and more on the idiosyncratic features of the relationship between each child and parent. This would allow for exploration about what it is in the interaction that might cause one twin to lean toward lesbianism and the other toward heterosexuality.

Ellis and Ames (1987) stated that by the second or third year of life a person's sexual orientation is formed. Subtle social encounters during this time appear to cause sexual orientation to develop gradually toward a variety of ends, one of these being lesbianism. The authors reported that some of these factors are

unhappy or broken homes, inadequate parental and same-sex role models, as well as dominant mothers and/or affectionless and weak fathers. Ellis and Ames stated that relationships between lesbian children and parents may be strained. The parents may treat their daughter as they would treat a son. This might cause the daughter to disown her femininity and become more masculine. On the other hand, the parents may respond to the daughter with irritation toward her inverted interests and mannerisms.

Developmental

Harry (1985) stated that sexual orientation must either be established very early in life or be biologically based. The evidence seems to indicate that the basis for sexual orientation is established by age 3 years (Luckmann & Sorensen, 1987). As children, homosexuals of both sexes appear to be more likely than heterosexuals to be gender nonconformists or cross-gendered. Homosexuals, as children, tend to play at a cross-gender role. In other words, many lesbian women may have had tendencies to be tomboys as children. This does not mean that they will necessarily become lesbians, but a greater number of lesbians reported cross-gender behavior than did heterosexual women.

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995), on the other hand, pointed out that most women who identify themselves as lesbians do so after an earlier period in their lives during which they identified themselves as heterosexual. The authors studied the transition from heterosexuality to lesbianism of 80 lesbians. Of these women,

19 participants had refused earlier in their lives to allow themselves to consider whether they were lesbian or not. Thirty-eight of the women reported earlier passionate feelings for another woman, which they had never acknowledged. Kitzinger and Wilkinson stated that a woman's whole life seems to be an unconscious acting-out of her lesbian destiny, only apprehended as an adult, which suggests that lesbian identity may be formed in late infancy through prepubescence.

Bem (1996) has suggested a developmental theory of sexual orientation which claims to specify the casual antecedents of an individual's attraction to opposite-sex or same-sex persons. The author stated that gender nonconformity in childhood is a causal antecedent to male and female homosexual orientation in adulthood. Bem postulated that a child moves through stages to come to his or her own sexual orientation. The stages are biological variables code for childhood temperaments (aggression, activity level, etc.). A child's temperament predisposes him or her to enjoy some activities more than others, and the child may enjoy sex-typical or atypical play and playmates. Gender- nonconforming children will feel different, even alienated from same-sex peers, perceiving them as dissimilar and exotic. The child experiences heightened, nonspecific autonomic arousal in the presence of peers from whom she feels different, but this arousal may not be consciously felt. This autonomic arousal is then transformed into erotic/romantic attraction to same-sex (female) persons. Thus, those who played more with boys

in childhood, such as lesbians and heterosexual men, preferred women as sexual or romantic partners in later years.

Psychosocial

Children are not raised in a vacuum. The society and family around them have an impact on their development. Can these psychosocial factors have an impact on their sexual orientation also? It would appear that psychosocial factors do have an impact on the development of sexual orientation.

Empirical Conclusions

Whitehead (1996b), in a study of sociological surveys, stated that lesbianism can be an ambivalent (i.e., detachment vs. attachment) relationship, not only with the mother but also with same-sex peers. This is often reinforced by adolescent same-sex activity and societal endorsement such as feminist ideals of sisterhood and empowerment. A girl who experiences a breakdown in identity with the mother may be less likely to feel like a girl and, therefore, less at home with groups of girls. This creates a feeling of being different from other girls. Whitehead stated that lesbian reports of childhood and adolescent same-sex peer group relationships are often painful.

Whitehead (1996b) also suggested that feminist groups and philosophies can give a woman with lesbian leanings an opportunity to become active and "come out of the closet." Whitehead stated that it would appear that wherever women unite against a patriarchal system and seek comfort and validation in a

feminist context, they may become more susceptible to a lesbian relation.

Sophie (1985-1986), in a study of women ($n = 14$) who were experiencing changes in their sexual orientation, reported that several (3) of the women did not begin changing their orientation until after they had contact with lesbians or gay men. For these women, the contact played an important role in leading them to consider lesbianism or bisexuality for themselves. The discovery of the relevance of lesbianism for oneself often was dependent on prior contact with other gay people. In another article, Sophie (1987) stated that many women did not consider lesbianism for themselves at all until after they had met positive lesbian role models such as a college roommate, a work colleague, or fellow sports team members.

Schneider (1989), in a study of self-identified lesbians ($n = 25$), explored the developmental process of "coming out." The author found that several of the women who "came out" were in a subculture of lesbian and feminist art, music, humor, and political thought. These women had been influenced by the feminist movement to adopt lesbianism. Coming out may require lesbian role-models and peers to be an influence.

Bailey and Zucker (1995) explored the relationship between childhood sex-typed behavior and sexual orientation. The authors used retrospective studies drawn from English language literature. Sample sizes in these studies ranged from 34 to 8,751, with a median of 189. The total number of participants included 8,963

heterosexual women and 1,729 lesbians. The research established that homosexual subjects recall more cross-typed behavior in childhood than do heterosexual subjects. Effect sizes were larger for males than for females, but it was still significant for females. Thus, lesbians recalled more childhood cross-typed behavior than did heterosexual women.

Chapman and Brannock (1987) explored lesbian identity in a study of women ($n = 197$), 96 % of whom were self-identified as lesbians. Of these women, 63% stated that they were lesbians because they found fulfillment from women and preferred women intellectually, emotionally, and sexually. These women reported feeling strong emotional or sexual bonds with girls or women. Sex with men was viewed as not as loving, trusting, intimate, or fulfilling as sex with women.

Theoretical Conclusions

Byne and Parsons (1993) posited that childhood gender nonconformity occurs early in life. They suggested that gender identity is established by the age of 3 years, largely in response to social factors such as sex assignment and rearing. Gender consistency is acquired somewhat later and appears to influence whether a child models her behavior after males or females. The authors also suggested that the stage for future sexual orientation may be set by experiences during early development, maybe even the first 3 years of life.

In a study by Berenbaum and Snyder (1995), lesbians reported that they

were more likely than heterosexual females to participate in sports and to be called a tomboy, and less likely experiment with cosmetics and jewelry and to wear dresses. Lesbians also reported that they played with opposite-sex playmates more than did heterosexual women.

Davis and Rentzel (1993) contended that during school age, there can be a disconnectedness from other girls who do "girl things." Often these girls are labeled tomboys, which can lead to being rejected as a girl as well as further detachment from femininity. Furthermore, Howard (1991) stated that when a girl who may have lesbian tendencies compares herself with peers of the same sex, she will often not measure up. There is often name calling (butch, dyke, etc.) by peers which feeds into her feeling of being different. These girls may also have experienced struggles about their sexuality, and the name calling becomes a label they take on as a part of their identity.

In response to an overview of sociological studies, Whitehead (1996b) suggested that family factors and childhood experiences are important in the etiology of homosexuality. Path analysis is typically used in these studies and reveals sociological and psychological determining causes for homosexuality. The author suggested that some of the factors explored, such as same-sex parent difficulties, childhood gender nonconformity, and early intense sexual experiences, may play a role in the development of a lesbian sexual orientation.

VanWyk and Geist (1985) attempted to understand the impact of

psychosocial variables on the development of homosexuality. The sample studied by the authors consisted of heterosexual females ($n = 3,392$) and lesbians ($n = 134$). Those females who had more female companions at age 10 years but more male companions at age 16 years tended to have a great proportion of heterosexual behavior in adulthood. Females who learned about masturbation by being masturbated by another female had a higher proportion of homosexual behavior as adults. The study indicated that those females who experienced some type of prepubertal experiences with adult males had higher Kinsey scale scores than did others, indicating a greater degree of lesbian behavior. It appears that these females learned to dislike engaging in sexual activity with those who pressured them into sexual activities with which they were not comfortable. If the female, during adolescence, finds herself relating to males who seem ignorant or uninterested in pleasing a female partner, she may find it less satisfying than she had hoped. She might then look to a female to meet those desires.

Conclusion

The etiology of a lesbian sexual orientation has been discussed in the literature. A great deal of controversy exists as to whether lesbianism is the result of environmental influences or secondary to biological factors. The articles cited in this paper have examined these factors in relationship to the development of a lesbian sexual orientation.

Biological factors, which included maternal stress, genetic factors, and hormonal factors, have been evaluated. Studies of biological predisposition toward lesbianism have shown no evidence that prenatal hormonalization alone preordains one to homosexuality or heterosexuality (Money, 1987). Even in the study of the DES-exposed women, where an elevation of the number of lesbians might be expected, the majority were heterosexual despite of their prenatal DES exposure (Meyer-Bahlburg et al., 1995). Studies of maternal stress have not indicated that there is an increase in offspring with lesbian tendencies. However, further biological research is needed to bring clarification to the issue.

Environmental predisposition toward lesbianism such as familial, sexual abuse, psychosocial, and developmental factors indicated that a combination of these factors may lead a woman toward development of a lesbian sexual orientation. Personal influences (e.g., psychological, familial, cultural) appear to be most important. Jones and Workman (1989) stated that, although homosexuality can develop without genetic or hormonal factors, it generally does not develop without the influence of psychosocial factors. Through clinical experience with a number of women, it has been observed that individual histories in combination with environmental factors, may have lead to a lesbian sexual orientation. In the clinical experience, no one factor was determined to be the root cause. Individualism and unique personal experiences are particularly important as formative factors.

Research has suggested multiple pathways may lead to a lesbian or heterosexual orientation, thereby allowing for the interplay of both biological and psychosocial factors. In addition, further areas that need to be explored in relationship to sexual orientation are gender culture, social class, race, and ethnicity (Patterson, 1995). It is imperative that the psychobiological community continue to research lesbian sexual orientation to make knowledge available and accurate and to eliminate myths, misconceptions, and prejudices regarding the origin of a lesbian sexual orientation. Additionally, studies must continue to allow an ego-dystonic lesbian to be aware of and value her attitudes and feelings about sexuality and those of others, enabling her to create interpersonal relationships with people of both sexes.

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